

Long Island Historical Society Building
128 Pierrepont Street
Brooklyn
New York

HABS No. NY-6100

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LONG ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUILDING HABS No. NY-6100

Location: 128 Pierrepont Street (southwest corner of Pierrepont St. and Clinton St.), Brooklyn Heights, New York.

Present Owner: Long Island Historical Society

Present Occupant: Long Island Historical Society
The Workbench
Twohy Kelleher & Gallagher, Esqs.

Present Use: L.I.H.S.:Library, storage.
The Workbench:furniture store.
Law firm.

Statement of Significance: This eclectic style building was designed by George B. Post in 1878-1880 for the Long Island Historical Society. It is one of the first to use architectural terracotta and to employ a sculptor of note.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is the files of the Long Island Historical Society, taken from the Kings County Record of Deeds.

1853 Deed December 1, 1853 recorded March 15, 1854 in Book 555 page 151/156 (lot #14)
Julia Evelyn Constable
to
Henry E. Pierrepont

1863 Deed April 29, 1863 recorded May 1, 1863 in Book 598 page 55/57 (lot #14)
Henry E. and Anna Maria Pierrepont
to
John H. Funk

1863 Deed dated April 27, 1863 recorded
May 1, 1863 in Book 598 page 52/55
(lot #12)

Henry E. and Anna Maria Pierrepont
to
Charles Dennis

1866 Deed dated November 28, 1866 recorded
December 1866 in Book 732 page 83/85
(lot #14)

John H. and Jane Ann Funk
to
George S. Stephenson

1867 Deed dated June 12, 1867 recorded
July 17, 1867 in Book 771 page 484/
485 (lot #14)

George S. and Ellen G. Stephenson
to
Long Island Historical Society

The Long Island Historical Society must
have bought lots #12 and #13 at the
same time from Charles Dennis. Total cost:
\$32,500.

2. Date of erection: November 11, 1878-January
12, 1881.

3. Architect: The building was designed by George
B. Post, an architect popular in his
day and well-known for his office build-
ings. Principle contractor: Mr. D.H.
King; Cut stonework: George Brown & Co.;
Ironwork: Mr. A Schweiger; Steam heating
apparatus: Baker & Co.; Granite and mar-
blework: French & Co.; Slate roofing:
George Fisher; Terracotta: Perth Amboy
Terra Cotta Co.

4. Alterations and additions: In May 1917, the
lecture hall was transformed into Red
Cross Headquarters by removing the rows
of chairs, the platform, and the stained-
glass windows. Instead, a hardwood floor
was installed. Ever since then this
space has been rented to various outside
groups.

In 1926, the first floor was re-
modeled into office rooms and leased.

The museum room was fitted with shelves and used for storage. At this time, the elevator was probably installed, taking up most of the skylight.

In 1948, the roof was completely overhauled and the metal work was painted. Repairs were made to the drains as well as to other small matters. In addition, walls were fire-retarded, door checks were added, glass in doors was replaced by wire glass, sprinkler system was extended .

B.. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In April 1863, the Long Island Historical Society was founded to provide a library of reference especially pertaining to general history, politics, art, science, and standard literature of all countries. The directors rented space in the Low Building but this soon became too cramped. In 1867, the Society bought three lots comprising a space of 75' X 100'. Financial setbacks forced the Society to wait until 1877 when a building fund was started and an architectural competition held. Many entered the competition and George Post won. In the late nineteenth century, the Society was an important Brooklyn cultural institution, supported by the leading families of that city. It not only provided literature dealing with almost everything and a natural history museum, but published important manuscripts, documents and letters, papers embodying original research which related to U.S. and particularly Long Island history. Most well-known of their functions were the meetings in the Lecture Hall where famous people such as Reverend Henry Ward Beecher and Matthew Arnold spoke on topics of historical, literary and scientific interest.

C. Sources of Information:

- 1.Views:The Long Island Historical Society owns competition drawings, Post's linen floor plans, second stage drawings, and two Artotypes in their print collection (#s 426 and 437) of the exterior and the entrance. The New York Historical Society owns copies of the linen plans, many preliminary Post drawings and watercolors. Various newspaper

and magazine illustrations and photographs are available in the Society's scrapbooks, including those in the vault.

2. Bibliography:

Atlantic Terra Cotta (New York: April, 1926),
Vol. VIII, no. 7.

Dilliard, Maud E. "The Story of the Long Island Historical Society," The Journal of the Long Island Historical Society, Spring 1961, pp. 1-7.

Harper's Weekly, "The Model New Building of the Long Island Historical Society," December 18, 1880, pp. 137-138.

Howard, Henry W.B., ed. The Eagle & Brooklyn, History of the City of Brooklyn, Part II. New York: The Eagle, 1893.

Long Island Historical Society scrapbooks (in vault), 1877-1883,; 1883-1894; 1894- 1942; 1942- . These scrapbooks included many valuable articles on the history and architecture of the L.I.H.S.

Rawls, Walton H. The Century Book of the Long Island Historical Society. New York: Long Island Historical Society, 1964, pp. 1-2.

Report of the Board of Directors of the Long Island Historical Society. May 21, 1878; May 10, 1881; May 1938.

Stiles, Henry R., ed. History of Kings County Including Brooklyn, N.Y., Vol. I. New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884, pp. 41-42.

Sturgis, Russell, "A review of the work of George B. Post," Great American Architects series. New York: The Architectural Record, 1895-1899,

Taylor, James. "The history of Terra cotta in New York City," The Architectural Record, Oct.-Dec. 1892, pp. 136-148.

Weisman, Winston. "The commercial architecture of George B. Post," The Society of Architectural Historians Journal, Vol. 31, n.3, October 1972, pp. 176-203.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is an example of a nineteenth century (late) eclectic building with classical and Queen Anne elements.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good-Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This building is 85' X 75' and shares a western party wall with a row house. The facade contains three bays and a tower placed to the west of the main body. The Clinton St. facade has five bays and the back faces Trinity church. It is three stories high.
2. Foundations: Stone, about 8' high.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Dark red Philadelphia pressed brick and terra cotta sculpture and ornament by Olin Warner and Truman Bartlett.
4. Structural system, framing: Solid masonry walls, solid brick wall crosses the main hallway at right angles from cellar to roof. Flooring: hard-finished wood.
5. Porches: Over the main entrance (Pierrepont St.) a sculptural terra cotta porch projects, with three polished granite pilasters on either side. The width of the portico is about 24', and that of the doorway about 8'.
6. Chimneys: An exaggerated Queen Anne style chimney stems from the terra cotta clock tower. Another average size chimney stands parallel to the large in the back. Both are made from brick.

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7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is in the porch previously mentioned. There are also five additional cherry wood and glass double doors distributed around the three sides.
- b. Windows: The third floor contains square windows separated by short piers. Huge round arched windows mark the second floor; each one is topped with a semi-circle of stained glass. The front and side have four and five bays respectively.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gabled , slate roof is topped by five cylindrical lights and an assymetrically placed clock-tower at one corner on which an exaggerated Queen Anne chimney stands. The cornice is highly ornamental and of terra cotta.
- b. Dormers: There are seven pedimented and sunflower ornamented dormers; two each are in the front and back, three are on the eastern side.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Sub-cellar: There is a sub-cellar under the front part of the building only. The cellar contains the steam heating apparatus and a water pipe that runs from the first to the third floors, with a connection for a hose at each landing.
- b. First floor: Originally the main tiled hall containing the staircase led to the lecture hall. This high-ceilinged space supported by eight columns is now divided between a furniture store and a law office.
- c. Second floor: The main hall opens onto the galleried wood-carved library, also supported by columns. Each level has two

anterooms which are part of the western hall complex. Staircases from the librarians' platforms are the only approaches to the gallery.

- d. Third floor: The museum, now used for storage, is directly above the library. Sliding doors provided for a small lecture room; there is also a separate room meant for the curator. The third floor is hung by iron rods from the roof trusses.
 - e. Attic: The attic contains the janitor's apartment and the attic storage space where the trusses supporting the museum floor are.
2. Stairways: The broad main staircase made of black ash is in the "platform" pattern with heavy panelled strings and faces. There are also a staircase leading to the basement, two staircases connecting the library floor to the gallery, and a circular wrought-iron staircase leading from a second floor ante-room to a first floor storage room.
 3. Flooring: Most of the flooring is yellow pine but some has been replaced by linoleum.
 4. Wall and ceiling finishing: Wainscoting in all rooms is of black ash in the cabinet design. Walls and ceilings are hard-finished white. The woodwork in this building seems to be both hand and machine carved.
 5. Doorways and doors: All interior doors are wood-paneled and glass. Each is decorated with brass doorknobs, hinges and plaques.
 6. Trim: The library and gallery contain black ash carved alcove cases for books. Columns in the library and lecture hall are encased in carved wood. Plain brick and wood fireplaces are in the anterooms. There is stained glass in the library windows and the hall skylight.
 7. Hardware: See DOORWAYS.
 8. Mechanical and electrical systems: The building

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was originally lighted at night by gas. Now it is converted to electricity. The building is heated by steam. There is an old water pipe system and a new sprinkler system to put out fires. Vestiges of a nineteenth century ventilation system still remain-metal air drum to collect vitiated air, ornamental gratings, etc.

Prepared by Lori Zabar
Barnard , 1975

For further information on the site see the paper written by Ms. Zabar now in the field record folder.